● 59
795

[For information on small scale family ceremonies, see category 78.]

J; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

443 121 198

case certain aspects of the historical development of Haiti have doubtless tended to reinforce African custom. Reference has been made to the fact that the great proportion of traders are women, a truism in Africa as in Haiti, where by general rule men are the producers and women the distributors of goods. In Haiti, however, the fact that for many decades men were likely to be arbitrarily impressed into military service by local chieftains when they came to town — particularly in Mirebalais, which had always been one of the centers of Caco activity — discouraged them from attending the markets. Thus African usage has here been reinforced by the historical fact of Haitian political instability. The fact that the proceeds from trading belong to the woman who does the trading, and that in consequence women are encountered who, though married, command independent means and exercise full control over their resources, is a carry-over of African tradition and, as in Africa, this gives to women a position in the economic world quite foreign to conventional European practice.

[302] 443 121 198 191

•59 611 198 [191]

The form of the family as found in Mirebalais demonstrates that the African social grouping which comprises all those descended on one side of the family has largely disappeared there, though it is possible that at least the vestiges of it may have survived in other regions of Haiti. Yet in West Africa, though descent is legally counted on but one side of the family, psychological adherence to the families of both parents is everywhere important. Therefore it is logical to assume that this concept, reinforced by the pattern of dual descent and double familial affiliation of the French, has been retained in Haiti to the neglect of the aboriginal larger groupings, where, as has been seen, not only is relationship counted on both sides of the family, but, more significantly, the right to reprimand and punish is held and exerted by elders in both the maternal and the paternal lines. On the other hand, it is apparent that the feeling for larger relationship groups has not been entirely lost, particularly in the paternal line, when

[199]

L: Humboldtia 1-4,5 (1930) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mitchell

such matters as the passing on of the *loa* in families, the duties toward family dead, and the possible inheritance of food taboos are recalled. Like all these survivals, that of food taboos is not as clear in its expression in Haiti as in its aboriginal setting. Its determination is largely by trial and error, so that a mother, before the birth of her child, not only abstains from eating the foods harmful to her, but later carefully tries these on the child to ascertain their effect. Yet the custom, at best, is a tenuous one. Sometimes, if food uncongenial to a parent has ill effects on a person, "he goes on eating it until he becomes accustomed to it"—though this statement brought forth an emphatic dissent from another Haitian: "Not I! If a food harms me once, I am through with it."

Africanisms are particularly marked in the organization of and attitudes toward the ancestral cult. Today the fear of the power of the dead is as living in Haiti as in West Africa, despite the influence of the Catholic Church in changing concepts of the heavenly world of the dead and the role of ghosts on earth. It is quite true that the outer forms of ceremonialism taken by ancestor-worship in West Africa have disappeared; but when the meticulousness with which the rites of death are carried out, and the institution of *manjé morts* are remembered, it is seen that the spirit of African ritual observances has by no means been lost. African elements have survived even in the services for the dead, now largely taken over by the Church. On the anniversary of death a special commemorative mass is sung in the church, which the family of the dead attend in a body. Before they leave the habitation for the mass, however, animals are killed to provide meat for the feast which follows the Church service, and for the *manjé morts*, which also takes place at the same time. Immediately after the mass a reception takes place at the house of some member of the family who lives in town, or at the home of a friend, where cakes and liqueurs are served. At about noon, however, family and friends proceed to the habitation, where

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

treatment. In the absence of sufficient analytic material on the intervening years since his book was written, a prefatory note such as this can do little more than comment on Haitian society, either in terms of its present design or in terms of the recent events that may have modified it.

The central thesis of Leyburn's book is that Haitian society is sharply divided into two segments, and that the national institutional structure is such that no significant alteration in that division has occurred in the entire course of Haiti's history as a sovereign nation. At the base of the society is the rural agricultural sector, making up perhaps as much as 95 per cent of the population; at the top the elite, which dominates the governmental apparatus and all national institutions. These two segments of the society differ, in Leyburn's view, in all important regards: level of income, source of income, education, language, religion, social forms, values and attitudes, and all else. By carefully describing the history of Haitian society from the eve of the revolution until the midst of the United States occupation, he reveals both the origin of this vast social cleavage and the various means employed for its perpetuation. Leyburn was so impressed by the gap which separated yeomanry and elite that he chose to label these social segments castes rather than classes. Members of the elite earn their livings as rentiers, merchants, professionals, and in government, and never engage in manual labor of any sort. They are predominantly urban in residence; their sons attend private lower schools, and then go on to higher education, usually abroad. They are French-speaking, although they also speak Creole, Haiti's national language. Elite religion is Catholicism, elite forms of marriage and domestic organization are "legitimate" and "western." Elite members view themselves as a kind of aristocracy, and feel little commonality in their sharing of Haiti and of Haitian history with the yeomen.

In sharp contrast, the yeomanry is rural, poor, works the land, is illiterate and Creole-speaking only, believes in *vodoun* rather than in orthodox Catholicism, usually marries by common law and is sometimes polygynous, and remains substantially isolated from the outer world. Finally and importantly—though its particular significance is changing—the elite differs from the rural sector in that the countryman is predominantly negroid in phenotype, while members of the elite are prevailingly lighter-skinned.

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

it seems not radically to have affected the masses but only the fairly well-to-do.

The *Royal Almanac* for the year 1814 touches proudly upon the moral state of the kingdom. The author of the almanac, the Comte de la Limonade, says: "Great attention is paid to morals and manners. Marriage is honored, protected, and encouraged; no Haitian who is unmarried can fill any place of distinction. Divorce is not permitted." All this was true; yet the mass of Haitians still remained unmarried. Nevertheless, the quotation indicates the extent to which Christophe had gone in his effort to reform marriage and morals among his people; to set them in the European tradition and draw them out of their African and colonial backgrounds.

While Christophe was trying to effect reforms in the North, Pétion was accepting his Southern folk as they were. Hardly a law during his twelve-year administration touches the subject of marriage. The élite colored people continued to make proper legal marriages and so insure the inheritance of their legitimate children. The common folk lived their family lives without weddings, and if property questions arose, custom ruled, backed by public opinion in their little communities.

Such are the backgrounds out of which modern Haitian sex relations have developed. From African tradition came family life, the importance of property to stabilize a union, insignificance of a wedding ceremony, familiarity with matrilineal kinship and descent; from French colonial practice, formal marriage to establish a family with social ambition, casual sex relations for pleasure outside this marriage, the claim of legitimate children to all property (in contrast to folk custom, where few legitimate children were born); from Dessalines, an emphasis upon the African tradition and realism; from Christophe, an insistence upon strict French practice in marriage and in the passage of property.

From among these alternatives Haiti made a choice which is an excellent example of what Keller calls "automatic selection in the mores."[7] There was no congress to select one procedure rather than another. Because Pétion and Boyer followed a *laissez-faire* policy in social matters, the people took the path of least resistance.

7. A. G. Keller, *Societal Evolution* (revised ed., New York, 1931), chaps. IV and V.